

How to Have a Green Burial in Vermont

Families in Vermont have natural burial options, including public cemeteries and private home burial grounds. Next-of-kin can make the burial date and time with the cemetery or have a funeral director do it. Home funerals followed by home burial may be conducted by family or funeral professionals. Plan to use burial containers that are easily biodegraded, such as pine, linen, cotton, wool, hemp, wicker, seagrass, or made from found natural materials. You may provide your own containers or find locally made caskets and shrouds at the Funerary Artisans Collective. Embalming is not required and is not allowed in most green cemeteries. Cooling is sufficient for several days.

Established Green Cemeteries

To search for cemeteries in Vermont that provide green burial space, go to NHfuneral.org>Green Burial>Green Burial Cemeteries in the US and Canada. If your town cemetery is not listed, contact your elected Cemetery Trustees to ask for a copy of the cemetery bylaws or ordinances. If vaults are required, contact your trustees to ask that they change the bylaws. To purchase burial rights, call the cemetery directly.



Photo courtesy: Donelle Dreese, Heritage Acres Natural Burial

Private Burial on Home Property

It is legal in Vermont to bury related family members on home property. If you live outside the village or city limits, or are zoned rural residential, you can usually create a family burial ground on your own land. It is important to understand that burying on private property constitutes establishing a private family cemetery that needs to be documented with the town.

Steps regarding establishment of a family cemetery:

1. Obtain the transit/burial permit from the Town Clerk's office or their designated deputy registrar; it must be signed by the Town Clerk or designated deputy, or a law enforcement officer in the town where the death occurred.
2. Check for local ordinances with the zoning authorities or the Town attorney. These are often easy to access online. If you don't see anything, there likely aren't any local restrictions.
3. Draw a map of the land showing the location, where someone might park, and where they are allowed to walk to reach the burial area. This must be recorded with the deed at the Town Clerk's office upon transfer of the property but can be done at any time. There may be a small fee.
4. Follow the VT state restrictions and guidelines provided in Vermont Statute 18 V.S.A. § 5319, to determine an appropriate location.

5. After burial, sign the burial/transit permit and return it to the Town Clerk's office where the burial occurred within 6 days of the burial.

Tips:

- Optimum burial depth is 3.5 – 4 feet deep.
- Use burial containers that are easily biodegraded, such as pine, linen, cotton, wool, hemp, wicker, seagrass, or made from found natural materials.
- If the grave is wet, dig a small trench at the foot for the water to pool.
- Line the grave with lengthy sticks or branches, and cover with evergreen boughs or other organic matter to create an oxygen trap and space to remove lowering ropes or straps.
- Mound all the soil above the grave to create a flat surface once settling has occurred.
- Displaced soil mounded on top creates a double smell barrier to keep out animals and rodents that will settle within a couple months.
- Winter burials are possible if time is taken to remove snow and thaw the ground sufficiently with coal fires, heaters, solar covers, or other methods.
- The casket may also be filled with sawdust or other insulating agent and held in a cold shed, barn, or garage until spring burial.
- See *Digging Deep: A Guide to Cemetery and Burial Law in Vermont 2017* available on the Secretary of State's website.
- For information regarding how to dig a natural burial grave, and to research general home and natural burial information at the Home Burial section of *How to Arrange Disposition* on the Vermont Funeral Resources, Education & Advocacy website.

Other Disposition Options

For information regarding other disposition options such as alkaline hydrolysis or natural organic reduction (cremation processes), go to the Green Burial Council>Education>Other Disposition Options. Although both methods are legal in Vermont, there are no facilities currently available. The closest alkaline hydrolysis facility is Minor Funeral and Cremation in Milton, VT.

Resources

- Vermont 18 V.S.A. § 5319 legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/18/121/05319
- Digging Deep 2017 sec.state.vt.us/media/886632/digging-deep-2017.pdf
- Funerary Artisans Collective funeraryartisanscollective.org
- Vermont Funeral Resources vermontfuneral.org
- New Hampshire Funeral Resources nhfuneral.org
- Conservation Burial Alliance conservationburialalliance.org
- Green Burial Council greenburialcouncil.org
- Minor Funeral Home minorfh.com/services/water-cremation